



**MICHIGAN  
CATHOLIC**  
CONFERENCE

## **Recognizing the Benefits of Marriage Senate Bill 752: Grace Period for Newly Married FIP Recipients**

A 2009 study of individuals on the federal Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program revealed that participation in the program had a negative effect on their likelihood of marriage, despite the program's primary goals of encouraging marriage and preventing nonmarital births. The study found that women often refrained from marriage only while receiving the benefits. These delayed marriages were inferred to be the result of the very real threat of losing one's benefits upon marrying.<sup>i</sup>

Current Michigan law contains a marriage penalty for those individuals who receive temporary cash assistance through the Family Independence Program (FIP).<sup>ii</sup> Getting married threatens the immediate termination of one's benefits upon factoring the income of their new spouse toward eligibility requirements. This threat creates a disincentive for low-income couples to marry; they simply cannot afford to get married if they will lose the temporary assistance they need to provide for their children.

---

47% of people in poverty agreed that unmarried adults "almost always" or "often" choose *not* to get married to avoid losing benefits.<sup>iii</sup>

---

Senator Wayne Schmidt (R- Traverse City) introduced Senate Bill 752 to remove this marriage penalty by providing an eighteen-month grace period for those newly married families on FIP. The grace period will provide a temporary spousal income disregard for those with household incomes not greater than 275% of the federal poverty guidelines.<sup>iv</sup> This will allow low-income families to gain financial stability together before losing any necessary assistance.

Further, marriage is a vital tool to help low-income families out of poverty. Numerous studies show that marriage benefits the economic well-being of children and has strong social, educational, and psychological value as well.<sup>v</sup> This policy will have long-term benefits for these families who marry.

### **MARRIAGE MATTERS**

- PROVIDES GREATER FAMILY STABILITY
- HELPS CHILDREN GROW UP IN SECURE HOMES

---

<sup>i</sup> Julien O. Teitler, et al., “Ethics of Welfare Participation on Marriage,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 2009 Nov 1; 71(4): 878–891, available at <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3068203/>.

<sup>ii</sup> To be eligible for FIP, individuals must have at least one minor child or be pregnant and meet additional means-tests.

<sup>iii</sup> Robert Doar, Karlyn Bowman, and Eleanor O’Neil, “2016 Poverty Survey,” American Enterprise Institute and *Los Angeles Times*, August 18, 2016, available at <http://www.aei.org/publication/2016-poverty-survey/>.

<sup>iv</sup> 2018 Federal Poverty Guidelines are \$20,780 for a family of three and \$25,100 for a family of four.

<sup>v</sup> W. Bradford Wilcox, “Married Parents: One Way to Reduce Child Poverty,” Institute for Family Studies Blog, June 21, 2017, available at <https://ifstudies.org/blog/married-parents-one-way-to-reduce-child-poverty>.